

LAST ORDERS FOR THE LOCAL?

Working class Space

- v -

the market place



Theme pubs and other environmental disasters

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Working class Space -v- the market place

1

"Poor Donald Cameron, 39, a Birmingham publican, has committed suicide. His pub had been revamped and given a Seventies theme. Cameron, who prided himself on his smart appearance, believed that he would look ridiculous in the outfit decreed for him by the brewers who owned the Kaleidoscope theme pub. They wanted him to wear a Seventies wig and flared trousers."

(London Evening Standard, 17/7/98).

"The introductory plaque at the entrance to Disneyland, written by Walt Disney himself, reads 'Here age relives fond memories of the past...youth may savour the challenge and promise of the future'"

"The whole idea is to escape from reality into a place where you can simply have fun. life is full of problems, but it is our job to stop harsh reality intruding. Euro Disney has a turn of the century feel... research shows that it is an era that most nationalities feel most comfortable with... we're trying to design what people think they remember about what existed." (Fred Beckenstein, senior Vice-president of Euro-Disneyland Imagineering, quoted in 'Organise', no 51, ACF. 1998.)

The layout of the pub has traditionally reflected the class and gender division of the wider society; a public bar for the working class, the saloon bar for gentlemen and ladies, with sometimes a smaller 'snug' for a particular group such as women or the elderly. (This is how most 20th century pubs were laid out but obviously, depending on location, their actual clientele could be exclusively of one class and/or gender). Now those divisions are largely gone, replaced by a more democratic consumerism, reflecting modern trends in marketing and consumption.

A pub's location has traditionally been the main factor in determining the class of its locals - although increasingly a selective door policy can also

be used, as can refurbishment to attract “a better class of customer” or younger age group. (So while pub landlords are occasionally prosecuted for racism for displaying anti-tinker and gypsy “no travellers” notices, a *class* apartheid is still maintained for some drinkers; e.g., in the City of London’s financial centre pubs still often display “no workboots or overalls” signs, to protect the brokers in their suits from having to share their drinking space with the dusty workers who build their offices.) The local pub and other institutions such as working men’s clubs have functioned to some degree as autonomous working class space, as sanctuaries and relief from the stresses of wage slavery and, especially in times of struggle, as centres of meeting and debate. But the development of the Theme Pub points towards Capital’s desire to see the end of all specifically working class space (except as containment areas; housing estates, ghettos, prisons etc.). Proletarian identity – as expressed in the environment – is being obliterated (the same has largely happened in the football stadium).

In the past a pub environment reflected the people who used this space, who they were and what they used the space for. To some extent, the environment was often of their own making, determined by what they did there. But increasingly nowadays a pub interior tells you only who is supposed to use the pub and what you are supposed to do there. Whether it’s too loud music, noisy gaming machines etc that force youngsters to huddle together to hear each other (the greater physical closeness calculated to appeal to those out on the pull) - or the shelves lined with books (bought by the weight as ornaments regardless of their content) encouraging a subdued library-like atmosphere - the authority of the environment attempts to assert



A ROADSIDE ALE-HOUSE.
(From a Fourteenth Century MS.)

itself on punters' behaviour. These choices have been made by the brewery marketing men and their designers.

Influenced by gentrification in the 1980's, when rapid image changes for pubs became common, the breweries have intensified the capitalisation of every aspect of pub life. Drinking space is being carved up and allotted to specific social groups (according to age and spending power), with décor and design (plus sometimes a selective door policy) used to attract the desired clientele as defined by the marketing men – all part of the streamlining of consumer targeting. This shows the real role of artists, designers and architects in relation to the pub (as in many other areas of life) – their work is a form of policing of the environment to further the ends of the breweries' marketing strategies.

The creation of the Theme Pub is intended to strictly limit or destroy any traces of autonomous social culture that previously existed in the pub environment, as part of a process also at work in other areas of society.

Like those native dancers and singers who are now obliged to make a living performing for tourists – re-enacting a culture that has already been destroyed by the colonisation process that tourism is a part of – the Theme Pub represents a manufactured image of authenticity (Irish-ness, Northern-ness etc) which is in reality its complete opposite. No wonder that the Theme Pub's theatrical décor often makes us feel like a bit-part actor in someone else's play.

The pub has kept much of its historical, individual and social character long after most other public spaces and areas of consumption have been economically 'rationalised' and standardised. For centuries occupying a central place in the community (for some at least) going

THE BROKER'S BIER BORSE

Schiffbauerdamm, (0049 30 705 4803).

This is a bit of fun aimed at those who like a drink but can't bear to tear themselves away from the excitement of the trading floor. From the outside it looks unexceptional – although nicely placed on the river by Friedrichstrasse – but above the bar is a screen displaying drink prices, which fluctuate according to demand. Bar staff stage mini-crashes, but spending your evening watching the screen for the moment to buy doesn't do much for conversation.

JUNE THEME WEEKENDS



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**BRITISH
HOLIDAYS**

to the pub was truly a visit to 'the local'. The pub name generally had some relation to either local or national history and the pub was often a geographical, and sometimes historical, landmark itself. But the emergence of identikit chains of pubs is changing this; in 1996 the Nag's Head in Islington in north London, which gave its name to the local area, became



“O’Neill’s” – part of a chain of Irish Theme Pubs. In response to unsuccessful protests by local residents a spokeswoman for the brewery which runs O’Neill’s said *“Pub names do change over the years, usually when investment is made.... There are 80 O’Neill’s bars around the country and the aim is to create bars so that the one in Holloway Rd will be the same as any other one around the country.”* (*Islington Gazette*, 19/12/96). Today any traces of a sense of community are gained more through our often somewhat randomly distributed social connections than from where we actually live; for many people there is no longer anything very local about

one's locality. We live in an increasingly uniform and anonymous environment of identikit chain stores, multi-national fast food outlets, shopping centres etc; all equally familiar and equally alienating, monuments only to our domination by commodities. And now pubs can be added to this list of Legoland amenities.

Theme Pubs like O'Neill's attract punters partly by appealing to their feelings of nostalgia fed by an increasing sense of dislocation, loss of identity and need for escape in the modern world; they encourage a temporary diversion into an environment representing an idealised past and/or a different, more novel or exotic culture. ('Irish-ness' in particular lends itself to this kind of interpretation, which can also be seen in Irish beer adverts as well as most other ads for Irish products – all the sentimental cliché images of 'the mother country' aimed at Irish emigrants as much as foreign consumers.) The *false history* of the Theme Pub environment is superimposed over the *real history* of the place; changing names and interiors are examples of this. History as accumulated lived experience that tells us something of ourselves – that locates and situates us – is replaced by an instant mass produced history, changing appearances and eras according to passing fashions and marketing strategies. Yet it is partly this disorienting *de-historicizing* of the daily environment that encourages nostalgia and (for some) an attraction to the Themed environment.



* * *

"This is the age of contrivance. The artificial has become so commonplace that the natural begins to seem contrived. The natural is the '-un' and the 'non-'. It is the age of the 'unfiltered' cigarette (the filter comes to seem more natural than the tobacco), of the 'unabridged novel (abridgement is the norm), of the uncut version of a movie. We begin to look on wood as a 'non-synthetic' cellulose. All nature then is the world of the 'non-artificial'.

Fact itself has become 'non-fiction'." (D. J. Boorstin, *The Image*, 1962.)

A recent innovation in pub Theming is the T and J Bernard chain. These are *"theme pubs whose theme is – wait for it – not looking themed."* With its 'traditional' interior of brass fittings and wood pannelling, its gimmick is *"that it doesn't have one."* According to a Theming supremo for one brewery, *"T and J Bernard is a fantastic idea because they have such a long life."* In the Theming business that means about 5 years. But the surreal nature of Theming is taken to new heights by one Ray Evans – a lost soul in search of an identity. Evan's local was a normal London pub until the brewery turned it into an Australian Theme Bar; English beers all replaced by Aussie lagers, a Kiwi manager, toilets marked Blokes and Sheilas, surfboards on the ceiling, food served in billy cans etc. *"Bar Ozis unlike anything in Sydney or even on Neighbours, but is recognisably Aussie – to Poms at least.... So what did the faithful Ray do now that the brewers had finally themed his original pub out of existence?.. Ray Evans decided to Theme himself. Previously broad Leeds, he now speaks in a pronounced Aussie accent, calls you blue, has a Kiwi girlfriend and is thinking of emigrating down under."* (Evening Standard, 1997.)

The search for identity in spectacular consumption leads to its total loss.

* * *



2

TIME TRAVEL

The Theming of pubs is only part of a wider application of Theming in the fields of leisure and tourism; this is in turn linked to changes in the social function of history and memory within capitalism and our shifting relationship to them. The modern quality of perpetual newness – *“the newer replacing the new”* – whether in consumer goods, ideologies or environments, only hides the unchanging nature of the fundamental underlying structure of class society. *“A fixed society is simply spinning faster”*. In a society that applies *“planned obsolescence to thought itself”* then *“the new not only surpasses the old, but displaces and dislodges it. The ability as well as the desire to remember atrophies.”* (Jacoby, ‘Social Amnesia’, 1975.)

This withering and wasting away of historical memory is encouraged by and occurs within an environment where all references to history have become merely props and scenery in the service of the market place and also its ideological justification – telling us how it was, is and always should be in, if not the best of all possible worlds, then at least the *only* possible one. The Theme environment is Capital’s colonisation of history materialised – congealed and frozen around us like a prison. As all traces of real history and memory are being obliterated in daily life, so its spectacular representation expands; as Historical Theme Parks, Heritage Centres, Industrial Museums etc.

There is a direct link between the growth of the “Heritage Industry” and the destruction of the traditional manufacturing industries – as well as the fate of those communities dependent on them; *“There has been a ... remarkable increase in interest in the real lives of industrial/mining workers. MacConnell points out the irony of these changes: ‘Modern Man [sic] is losing his attachment to the work bench, the neighbourhood, the town, the family, which he once called “his own” but, at the same time, he is developing an interest in the “real lives” of others’ (1976). This interest is particularly marked in the north of England, where much heavy industry had been located. It seems that it is such industries which are of most interest to*

visitors, particularly because of the apparently heroic quality of the work, as in a coalmine or steelworks."

"Nostalgia is the memory without the pain."

The prospects for the redundant workforce and their community appear less "heroic": *"The Rhondda Heritage Park is the latest in a series of large scale heritage parks like Ironbridge in Shropshire, the Black Country Museum in the West Midlands and Beamish in the north-east that have a 'cast' of characters in period costume. For the most part these are people recruited at Government expense from job creation schemes: the unemployed of the Eighties paid to pretend to be the employed of the Twenties. For these 'museums' the temptation is to 'sanitise' the past: trim out the nasty bits, omit the poverty, the hunger and the strikes – to see life as a newsreel film of the Thirties and Forties, where the working classes are always irrepressibly cheerful."*



Marking an intended past

So, while the museums create a past that never really happened, the consequences of *real* defeat quietly take their toll. As depression and heroin ravage



“Well, son, you’re 15 now, it’s off down the Heritage Museum in the morning.”

what is left of some mining communities* (something that was unthinkable 15 years ago), we can visit a Heritage Centre and see a few ex-miners employed to dress up in colliers costume to perform a role for the visitors. Once again, Capital’s old strategy; destroy the native culture, then get the natives to earn their survival by dancing for the tourists. With the destruction of nearly all community, and with it an identity and tradition, history as

lived consciousness – of the roots of oneself and one’s situation – begins to die. Leaving only a nostalgia for a falsified history as the last refuge of the dispossessed.

“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” (George Orwell.)

Heritage centres, Preservation areas, Historical zones etc are precisely the places where there is no longer any history being made – the act of preservation ensures this, like a form of mummification. It is a part of the de-historicizing of our environment (and our consciousness of it) where time becomes frozen, the clock has stopped at a certain date. This capturing of the

** One relevant example of how the ruling class has used censorship and repression of memory to help impose and maintain the crushing defeats suffered by the working class in Britain in the last 15 years; when the final big wave of pit closures were announced in 1992 by Minister Heseltine, within a week 300,000 people were marching through torrential rain in London in protest – as if the disappearance of the once mighty miners, symbols of the collective strength of the working class throughout its history, had touched a nerve deep in the proletariat’s folk-memory. Heseltine’s cagey and devious response was to say he would reconsider the proposals. 3 months later, after a total media blackout, all those pits were gone – marked only by the odd liberal journalist hypocritically expressing mild concern – after the event of course. But obviously the real battle had already been lost for the miners in the 84/85 strike....*

past by the rulers of the present runs parallel with their projected designs on the future. All history is portrayed in bourgeois terms, and as leading to, if not the best of all possible worlds, at least the only possible one; i.e. perpetual modern capitalism. So the Preservation area, Theme park and Museum become the model for the environment of the future; ever more policed and controlled, CCTV covering every angle. Yet ever more interactive, "hands on" and "entertaining" in a cretinizing kind of way, where only what is supposed to happen ever does – over and over again.

Allied to this is modern architecture's goal (aided by modern synthetic building materials) to abolish all built environments that live, breathe and visibly grow old – and their replacement by sterile, easily maintained and controlled surroundings. The historical suppressed by the perpetually functional. The "preservation" of older buildings freezes them at a certain age, creating a similar effect.

* * *

"Shopping, as anyone knows, is what makes the world go round. It is the vigorous weed that occupies ever more luxuriously the spare spaces of airports and museums with its mutating forms, and which has entwined itself with almost every cultural and leisure experience you care to think of. Cathedrals, stately homes, the National Gallery, the National Theatre and Chelsea Football Club all feel the need to authenticate themselves with a shop." (Evening Standard, 1997). As every leisure/cultural event becomes more of a shopping experience, so every shopping experience becomes more of a leisure/cultural event. The various threads of Heritage and Theme environments, leisure and cultural experiences and shopping are all being pulled together by the latest developments in the American shopping mall. They are now becoming *"total leisure experiences"*; *"To flourish, a mall must no longer be just a mall. It is no longer enough just to garnish some shops with potted palms, fountains and Muzak. A mall must now offer what a computer can't, fuse itself with that other great power in the world, entertainment, and become an experience.... Ontario Mills, one of the new breed of uber-mall.... Is about more than just shopping. The secret of its success is that it brings together in a deadly combination two previously separate concepts: one is the themed mall, where the shopping glands of the masses are lubricated by allusions to (for example) Ancient Rome, as in*

Caesar's Forum in Las Vegas or the new Trafford Centre in Manchester. The other is the outlet mall, where designer labels are sold cheap.

"Ontario Mill's other big idea is to give almost as much space to entertainment as to shopping. There are amusement arcades... Basketball courts... and the American Wilderness Experience, where real snakes, seals, wildcats, tarantulas, sloths and long-tailed porcupines occupy glass enclosures within not-real redwood forests. There are also 50 cinema screens....The building is a vast, flat shed, the size....of 38 football pitches." (Evening Standard, 1997.)

All over the western world, a family day out now often means a drive to the out-of-town shopping mall, where shopping and leisure have seamlessly merged and entwined into one unified experience – the organisation of territory determining the content of activity and social relationships permitted there.

The architectural references to Ancient Rome unintentionally remind us that such past empires and "civilisations" were also class societies – the word "proletarian" is Roman in origin. And as always, today's proles remain a troublesome necessity for the ruling class; and those poor who are inevitably excluded from fully participating in this shopping heaven nevertheless still come to congregate in these cathedrals of consumption. Whether on shoplifting sprees or just hanging out with pals, they often have to defend their presence against the harassments of the private security guards.

* * *



IT WAS A BAD DAY FOR SHOPPING

Other themed environments – the ethnic/cultural "leisure experience" or culture-vulture trip – are based on an accumulation of cultural motifs, stereotypes and artefacts from the history of a particular ethnic group. Like nostalgia, this visitation into another culture is also a form of yearning to escape from one's normal daily experience; the appeal of otherness – experiences in contrast to normality.

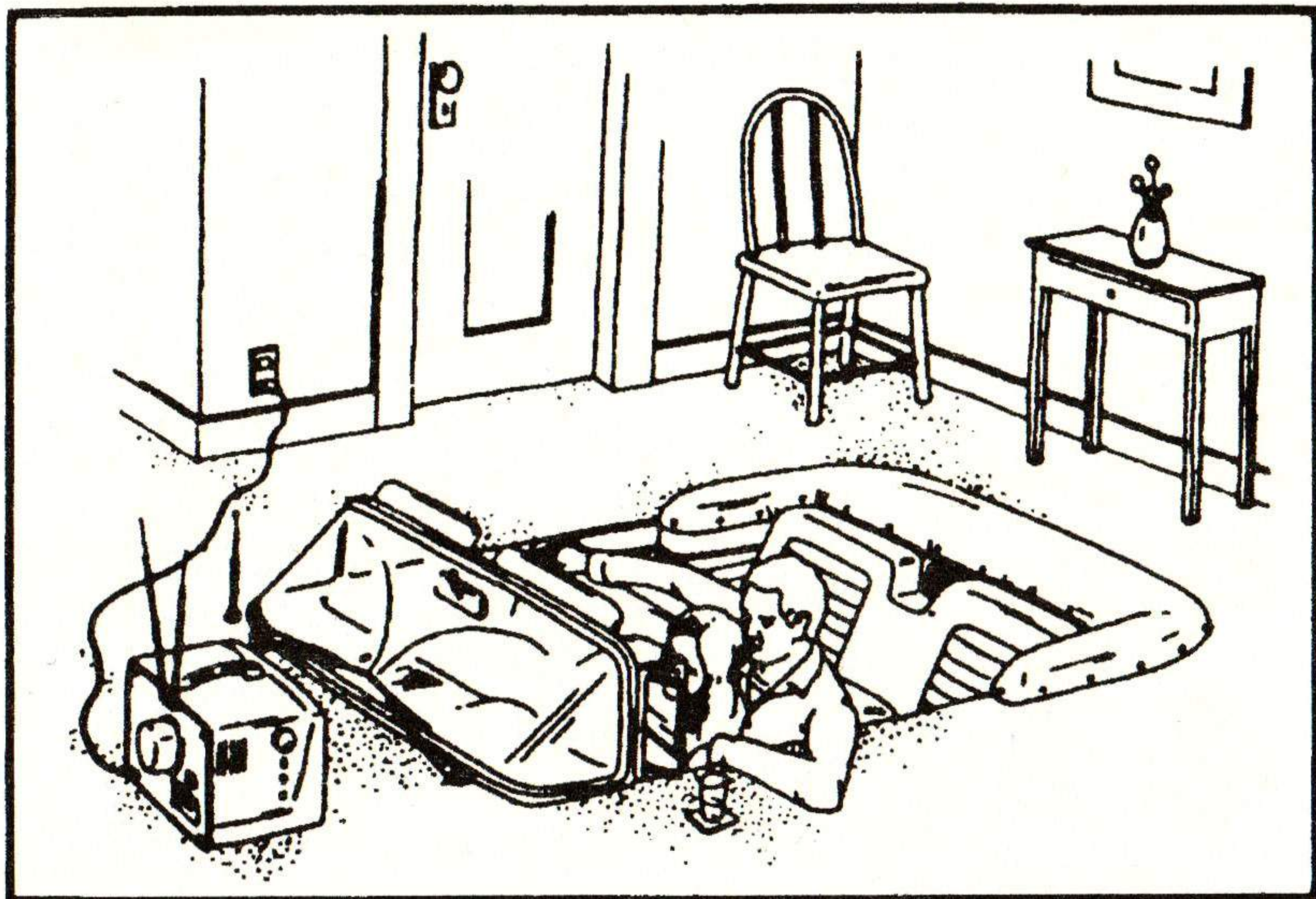
“Themed cafes, restaurants and bars, where diners sit down for the fancy dress and props as much as for the food, are set to become even more popular... New ones are expected to open at the rate of 15 to 20 a year, to meet an appetite for eating out in recreated film sets, Mississippi riverboats, rock memorabilia museums and fibre glass jungles. Themed establishments could count for 1 in 10 restaurant meals... Britons will spend more than £250 million on the “leisure experience” by 2001... Next month will see the opening of the Rainforest Café, a recreation of a South American jungle with real parrots, waterfalls, a crocodile pit and tropical storms.” A Rainforest Theme Park is also being constructed in England, and Rainforest Cafes are a worldwide chain. So as the irreplaceable Rainforest is being destroyed in reality, its tacky artificial representation is reproduced everywhere; in a very few years this Café may come to double as a museum.

* * *

*“The next stages of other-worldliness are here already. Disney is launching interactive theme-parks in the US at the moment. Created by ‘imagineers’ using highly sophisticated virtual reality technology, they allow you to climb aboard a river raft and then believe you are paddling down rapids; or fight with the Disney **Hercules** characters; or ride a magic carpet.”* (Organise, 1998.)

Theming applies the tourist concept to much of leisure, and increasingly to other forms of consumption; go shopping on a Themed mall, later visit an Ancient Roman Theme Park, tonight an Irish Theme bar, then on to a South American Theme restaurant, after that maybe a Rave party (the psychedelic Theme park)... Debord defined tourism as *“human circulation considered as consumption”*. Trips to a different location bring the sharpest contrast with everyday life and are therefore meant to give the greatest relief from it. But as the tourist’s main activity is looking, recording their own looking and other forms of passive consuming, Theming is intended to refine and rationalise the tourist role: instead of taking the tourist to the exotic location, Theming brings the exotic location to the tourist – *localising it*. The logical extension of this is virtual reality tourism, as seen in the film “Total Recall”. The inconvenience and expense of actual physical travel in the company of others is eliminated – *“This society which eliminates*

geographical distance reproduces distance internally as spectacular separation." (Debord). Many aspects of Capital's projected future are evident here; new technology, in the guise of *communication* gadgets, increases isolated consumption as leisure - walkmans, mobiles, personal computers, virtual reality trips; the pain of mutual social isolation and repression encourages the desire to escape the body by fleeing into cyberspace (and other e t h e r e a l



spaces) – the ultimate destination of the severely alienated individual. (Naturally there are counter-tendencies and subversions of Capital's intentions....some hacking, phone phreaking, Net discussion sites etc.)

* * *

3

1st TIME AS TRAGEDY, 2nd TIME AS FARCE

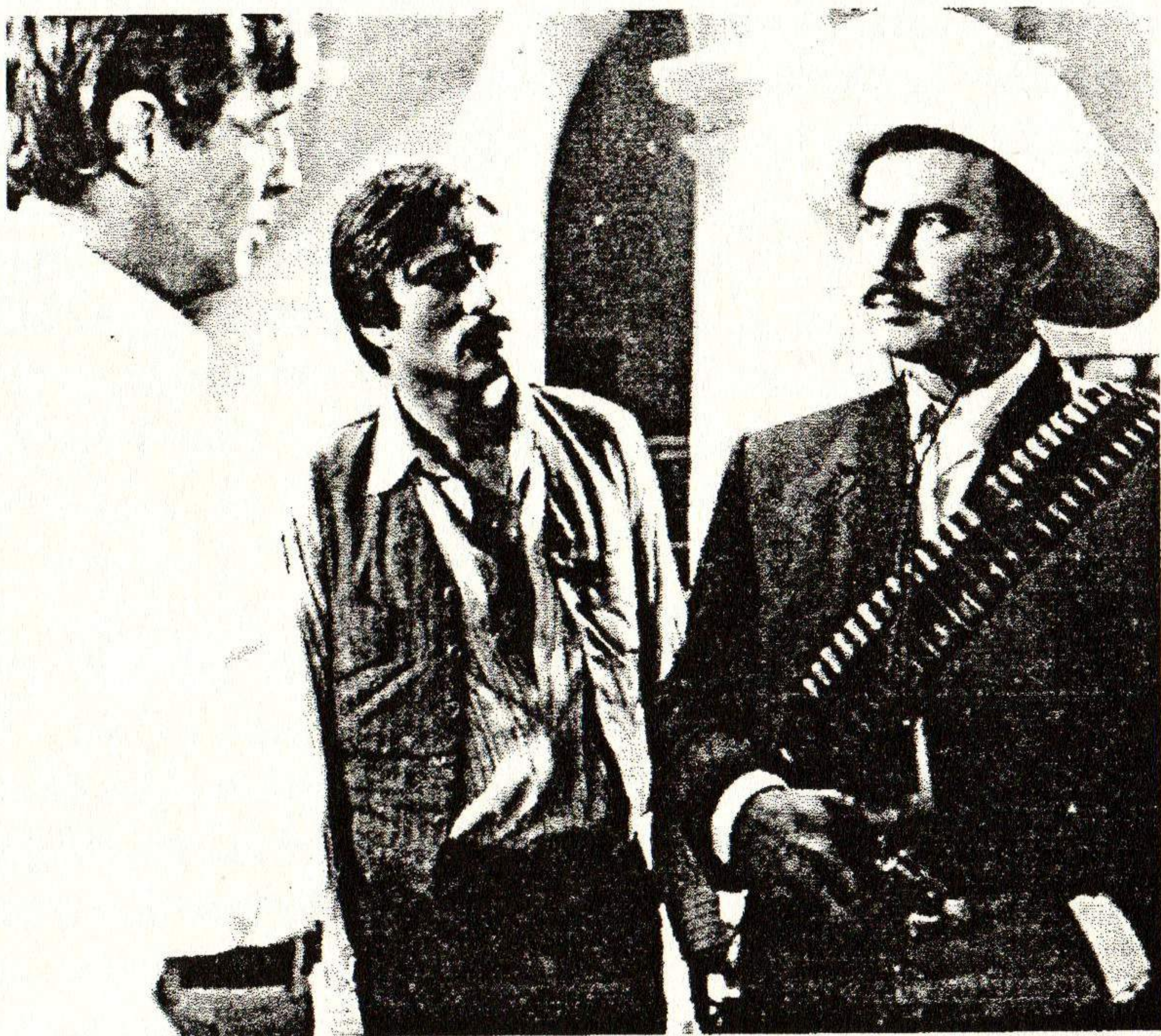
"The strength of revolutionary armies lies in their creativity. Frequently the first days of an insurrection are a walk-over simply because nobody plays the slightest attention to the enemy's rules: because they invent a new game and because everybody takes part in its elaboration. But if this creativity flags, if it becomes repetitive, if the revolutionary army becomes a

regular army, then blind devotion and hysteria try in vain to make up for military weakness. Infatuation with past victories breeds terrible defeats.” (Vaneigem, *“The Revolution of Everyday Life”*.)

“On January 3, 1914, in the city of Juarez, [Pancho] Villa signed an exclusive contract with Mutual for the sum of \$25,000. It was also contractually agreed that Villa would do his best to win all his battles in sunlight and to forbid the presence of any other rival cameramen on the battlefield! Aitken also stipulated that in case Mutual did not succeed in shooting enough suitable material during the actual battle, Villa would guarantee to re-enact it the next day before the cameras.” (Quoted in *‘Spectacular Times: Cities of Illusions.’*)

The re-enactment of historical battles is said to be the fastest growing hobby in the UK, drawing large crowds of spectators to battle sights. Partly a simple fetish, perhaps, of military uniforms, weaponry and strategy (toy soldiers for big boys) – while ignoring the deeper social roots and context of the battles (such as class conflict) – but also an attempt at temporary escape from the modern

world into a cosy nostalgic primitivism. One feels that these spectacles of frozen historical costume drama are just asking to be playfully subverted; the many re-enactments of battles from the English Civil War of the 1600’s are a prime example. After all, many of the unresolved



Pancho Villa as Yul Brynner

social tensions of the present day originate in this period – questions of ownership and access to land and commons, class relations, the role of the monarchy etc. One can imagine a band of Diggers and Ranters (the true radical elements in the Civil War) storming the battlefield and disrupting the carefully choreographed manoeuvres of Parliamentarians and Royalists; at the same time Digger and Ranter pamphlets could be distributed to the spectators with an accompanying critique of the event and our reasons for disrupting it - and calling for them to join in, to cease being spectators and to enter the battlefield of history. Just a mad fantasy? A *Reclaim the Battlefield of History* movement, anyone? The desire to finally live history and no longer merely consume it has been too long repressed.



***Re-enactments we'd like to see: another king Charles
marched to his execution...***

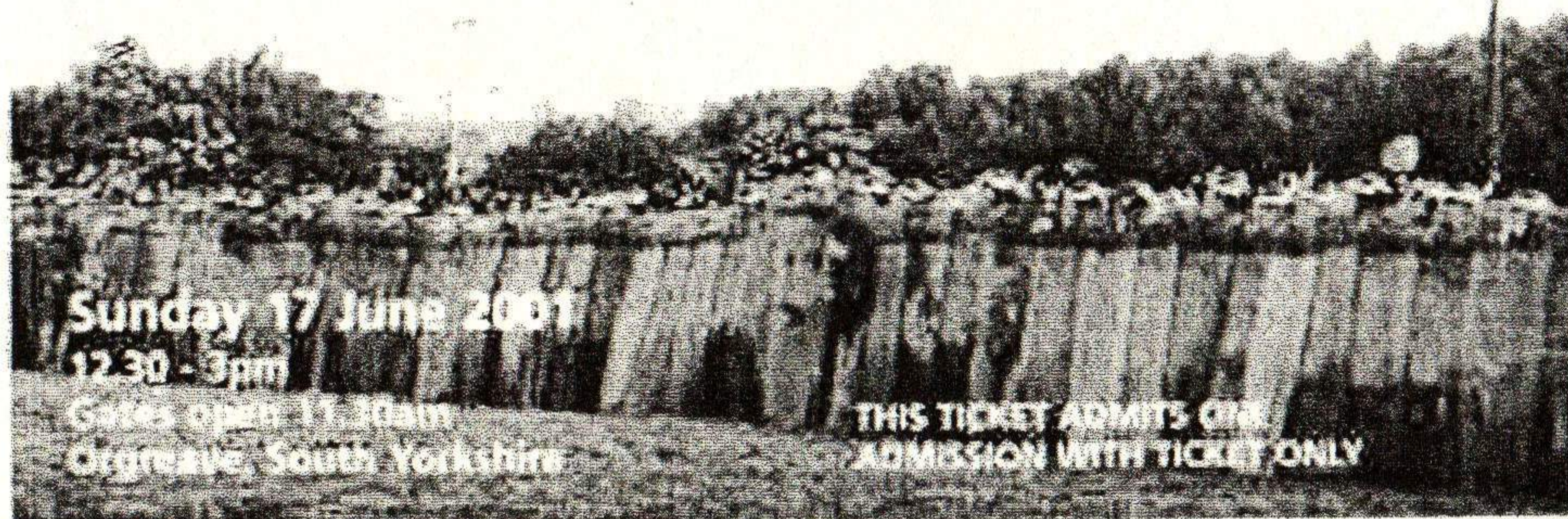
"How long does the battle last?" I asked. "It starts at 12.30 and ends at 3.30, but there's an interval for lunch at 1.30," replied the woman with the Coal Not Dole badge. We all laughed nervously.' (Guardian, 21/6/01.)

A pathetic parody of this repressed desire was recently played out on the 15th anniversary of perhaps the bloodiest picket line conflict of the Miners Strike; the *Battle of Orgreave* was re-enacted near to the original site. Filmed for Channel 4 TV by a Hollywood director, and with ex-pickets and cops from the original battle as extras (but 'real' actors playing the 'heroes' of the event such as Arthur Scargill – typically bourgeois history as *the history of leaders*), the event was painstakingly reconstructed from media footage of the time. As always, once the event is safely far enough in the past, the media that acted in its own class interests by lying and distorting the truth in the real time of the class struggle, feels confident enough to now reveal a somewhat more truthful version of events; *now that it no longer has any consequences*. This is a sure sign of the ruling class's confidence that these are dead issues, definitively resolved in their favour. They want us to believe that class struggle is a thing of the past. Again, the colonisation process at work; get the defeated to dramatise their defeat as entertainment for the victors. Despite a bit of temporary flattering attention and extra pocket money for the locals, who really gains from this farce? No one but the ruling class and their media. The claims that the event was therapeutic (or

Artangel 2001

THE BATTLE OF ORGREAVE 1984

A LIVE RE-ENACTMENT FOR TELEVISION



“healing”) for some are predictable – but what does it help them come to terms with? Only the *acceptance* of their defeat and all its consequences since.

This filmed re-enactment follows in the footsteps of other Northern films like *'The Full Monty'* and *'Brassed Off'* which (although quite funny) are really just hymns of praise to the new entrepreneurial economy that

smashed the miners and others and replaced their solidarity with the Thatcherite 'get on your bike' selfish individualism. The sermon is that redundant industrial workers should move with the times and reinvent themselves as cultural entrepreneurs, giving a positive, if unrealistic, inspirational message to the post-industrial workforce. Want to escape low wage drudgery? Then compete commercially against your former fellow workers and neighbours and/or try to sell them things. "A nation of shopkeepers" in the making...

A real re-engaging with the making of history can clearly only occur on the terrain of a major resurgence of class struggle... *which we await with some urgency....*

* * *

4

PROLETARIAN GEOGRAPHY

The increased commercialisation of pubs, and other social space, and the progressive destruction of those aspects that once kept them as socially welcoming (as opposed to merely *commercially enticing*) only shows that the contradictory tensions of these places and their use have been resolved in favour of the market forces that *were always one part of the equation*. Defeats in the area of leisure are linked to defeats suffered in production; the virtual collapse of workplace struggles since the 80's and its shattering of confidence and basis for solidarity had a knock-on effect with a decline of struggles outside production – in the areas of life where we reproduce ourselves such as housing, public services and leisure.

For example, disinvestment in various dockland areas (Liverpool, Cardiff, London etc) was an effective weapon in wrecking dockworkers combativity and their communities during the 80's and 90's. As the traditional industries have closed in these areas 'urban regeneration' (or 'waterfront development' in estate-agent jargon) has often been touted as the solution to unemployment, poor housing etc. Gentrification is presented and

justified as the means to provide the infrastructure necessary to attract new investment to revitalise the area; so local shops get replaced by ones more appealing to the incoming yuppies/gentry (art galleries, estate agents, wine bars etc), pubs get gentrified and Themed and the unemployed get forced out of their boozers and off the dole into crap low paid jobs providing services for the new settlers.

* * *

We comprehend architecture and environment "*in a twofold manner; by use and by perception – or, rather by touch and sight.*" (W. Benjamin).

Themed locations are *pseudo-environments* in the sense that they are parodies or copies of other places that possess a real history of specific uses for their location - while the Themed space is mere transported appearance, taken out of its original context and given a different function for the purposes of commodity consumption. In the original *real* environment the appearance was largely determined by the use the place was put to – while in the *Theme* environment the appearance is intended to determine the use of the space. The Theming attempts to pre-determine what can happen in such spaces; the script is already written and a role already prescribed for you, which means various forms of consumption. But what is being consumed is not only the food, drink, exhibits or whatever else is being bought, but also a kind of *framing* of the consumption venue, framing the permitted limits of behaviour.

Theming bears a relation to material commodities which is similar to that of advertising and shop window dressing; a less tangible less easily quantifiable commodity than those that are physically consumed, operating on a more ideological, emotional and aesthetic level. Just as Capital seeks to destroy all autonomous use of public space by reducing it down to a common consumerism, so it seeks to dominate the psychic map – a kind of urban planning of the mind; Theme environments are very carefully planned by specialists down to the smallest details – but they are designed to influence our behaviour and encourage consumption at a subconscious level, in much the same way as Muzak or advertising. "*Culture – the ideal commodity that sells all the others.*"

* * *

5

THE PRICE OF TIME

"Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself."
(Marx, 'Grundrisse'.)

"Work is the curse of the drinking classes."

From around 1100 to 1300 church bells were the main markers of time in daily life, calling the people to Mass. There were also secular bell signals developed – for example to indicate that the parish oven was ready for baking. But their most important use was for enforcing curfew; indicating that all fires must be out and all lights extinguished at a certain time of night – 9pm in many places.

In 1282 in London a law was passed that *"at each parish church*



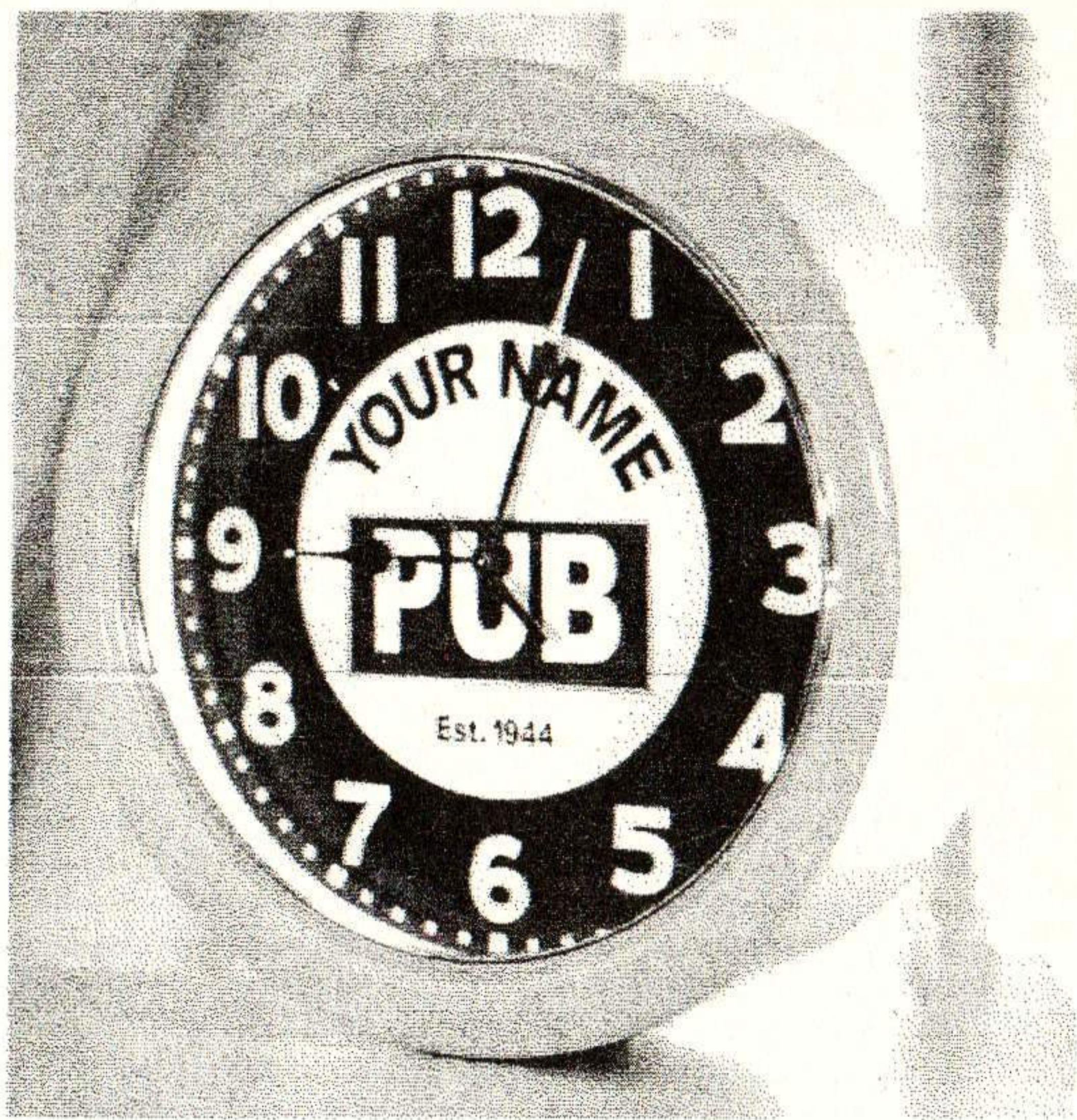
CHAUCER'S PILGRIMS SEATED ROUND THE TABLE OF THE
"TABARD," AT SOUTHWARK.

(A reproduction of Caxton's engraving in his second edition of
the "Canterbury Tales." 1484.)

curfew shall be rung at the same hour as St Martin's (Le Grand) beginning and ending at the same time, and then all the gates, as well as taverns, whether of wine or ale, shall be closed and no one shall walk the streets or places."

In its ascendancy as

a class the bourgeoisie made a history that changed the general conception of time; the decay of medieval society and the emergence of the rising bourgeoisie and consequently *"of the free market, was expressed succinctly, by the development of a new mechanism, that of the clock...."*. The rising bourgeois class *"were learning... that Time is Money. In the past there had been sundials and waterclocks, clumsy mechanisms with a limited effect in the regulation of existence.*



But the clock proper made possible a total new system of controlling and arranging human activity; it broke men from the agricultural year as the basic measure of life, a matter of rhythms and of adjustments to the phases of nature. Now men could in many important spheres increasingly ignore the earth-rhythm and treat time as an abstract line divided into equal moments or lengths. For the idea of time as a maze, a circle, a spiral, a series of rhythmic coordinates, a unifying moment, there was substituted the idea of time as a mechanical succession of rigid units. If we look at the periods of early industrialisation we see what anguish it was for the peasant, brutally torn from the land, to accustom himself to the treadmill cage of the relentless clock, which he felt as identical in its beats with the nagging finger of the new master, money." (J. Lindsay, *'A Short History of Culture'*, 1963)

How time is experienced is determined by its location, by where (and how) it is passed. The forced removal of the peasantry to the towns by the Enclosures of common land was necessary before the new discipline of clock time could be fully imposed. The new industries threw workers together but also created new separations; in the form of domestication to new patterns of life and labour and habitual obedience to new authorities such as clock time. The pub was a place where workers could retreat from the stresses of work, partially reconstitute new community and overcome separation. As well as simple social relaxation, pubs were also frequently used for (often clandestine) meetings to organise unions, self-education, strikes and insurrections.

In the workplace workers have (to varying degrees) through struggle often retained some control over how their work is organised. Similarly, due to the nature and history of social alcohol consumption, drinkers have by default been to some degree the authors of the pub environment, by their needs and preferences. But as Capital has consistently tried to restructure to regain control in workplace production in the interests of greater profits and discipline, so the same process occurs in the environment; both at the level of urban planning and also of interior design such as pubs and other leisure spaces.

Nowadays it may no longer be religion but *consumption* that is the “*opium of the people*” and *the commodity* that is now the object of worship, but the bell rung for ‘*last orders*’ every night in every pub contains an echo of the church curfew and of the ordering and arranging of time as discipline and economic measurement – and it still rings out the same orders. The domination of clock time that made labour so alienating also penetrated into the leisure used as escape from it. The revolutionary transformation of lived time and space is a rendezvous we are already late for...

* * *

“Historical time is not simply measured time. It is time that has been lived through, suffered, and experienced. It is determined not by the hand of the clock moving forwards minute by minute, but by the far more a-rhythmical clock of internal and external experiences.” (Jacob Burkhardt, 1868.)

‘I drink, therefore I am.’

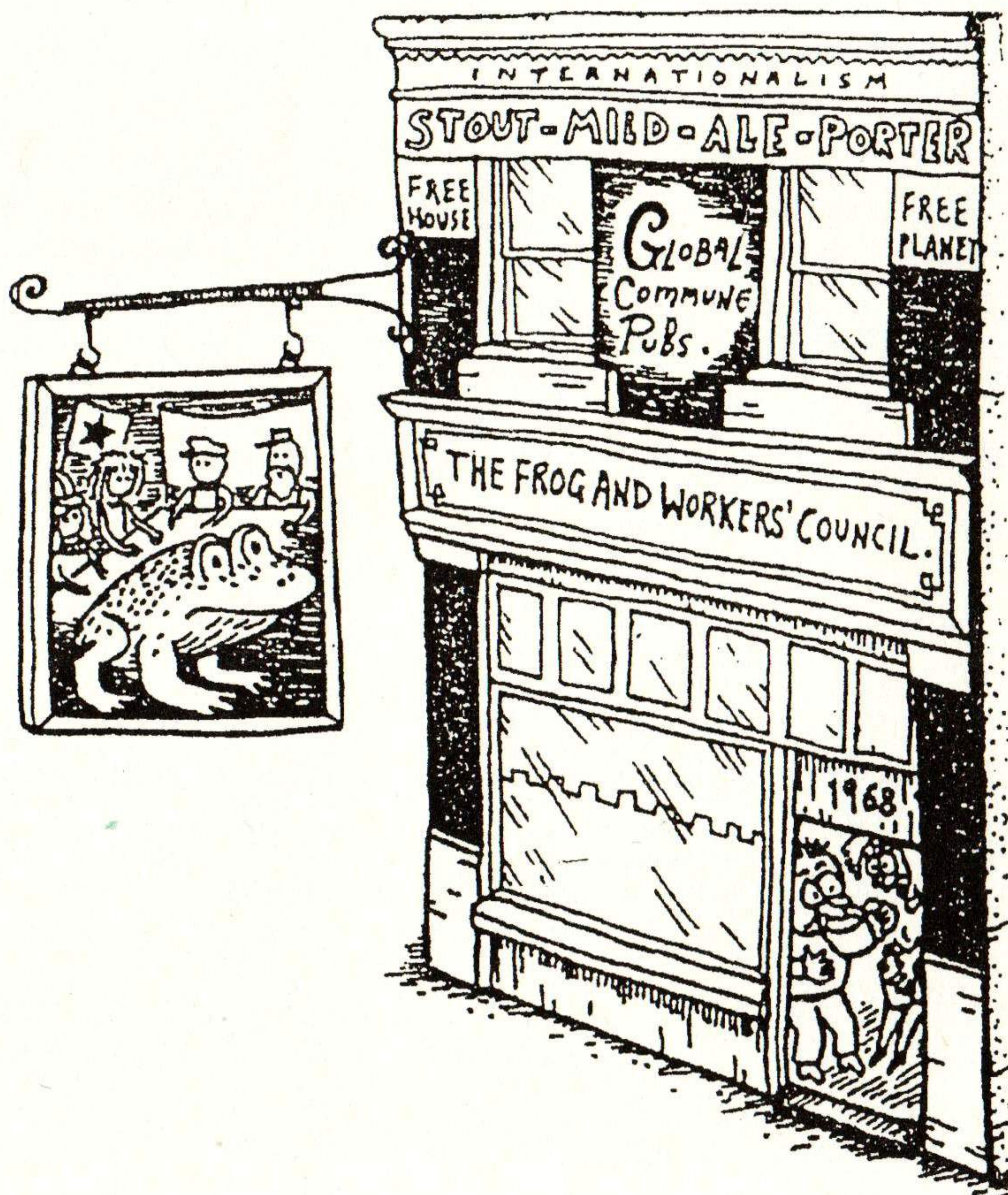
Pubs have historically been the predominant and most long lived working class social space. Periodic refurbishment, whether through Theming and/or gentrification, only reflects the fact of our being ***dispossessed of the means for the conscious creation of our environment***; this is the essence of the proletarian condition - we produce these means but their use is monopolised in the hands of the ruling class. Radicals have long been aware of this fact as regards the labour process of production, but we have often failed to see that the same is increasingly true in the fields of leisure, culture and environment where we reproduce ourselves. Theming and gentrification gives the illusion of movement, development and innovation - and encourages us to identify with this enforced trendiness - but the unchanging basis of commodity relations and class society is the necessary

foundation for these marketing trends and modifications of social space.

* * *

Although today we might have more appreciation of the value and use of some places deliberately left uncultivated and domesticated, we can still appreciate the basic sentiments of Walter Benjamin, who saw outlined in the work of Charles Fourier a world where *“places are cultivated by human beings, made useful and beautiful by them; all, however, stand, like a roadside inn, open to everyone.”*

We'll drink to that.



This text was first published in November 2001 by
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The text is available online at **endangeredphoenix.com**

Surprisingly, the original edition of this pamphlet was reviewed in *What's Brewing*, the newspaper of the Campaign For Real Ale, under the heading "Worthy inspiration for CAMRA campaigners"(!). Excerpts from what they said:

"... it's nice to see the spirit of pamphleteering continues..."

Thinkers have used pamphlets to disseminate their ideas since the dawn of printing and, even in these days of Internet newsgroups, a 24-pager like this can help carry a message to the public.

It's a message we are perhaps unlikely to read in our newspapers, whose advertisers are capitalists - surprise! The subtitle leaves us in no doubt this is a serious piece of work: working class space v the market place, theme pubs, and other environmental disasters.

The creation of theme pubs is part of the agenda of the ruling class because 'they' want to replace real history with false history to generate revenue. [...]

The anonymous author makes some good points and CAMRA campaigners working to save the heritage contained in our pubs may find some useful arguments why society should resist demolishing the new for the newer. [...]

If you like a good argument or pondering on "what is real" then you'll find plenty to get your teeth into here."

(Mark Webb in What's Brewing, February 2002)

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check out this and other texts at www.past-tense.org.uk

Inspired by the destruction of most of the best pubs
in our locality and the increasing difficulty in
finding a pub with a bearable atmosphere to enjoy
a drink in, *Last Orders for the Local?* casts a critical
eye over recent changes to pub environments and
the emergence of Theming as a marketing factor in
various fields of leisure and consumption; and
ponders how this connects to the balance of class
forces and changes in the way we relate to history
and memory.



Drunk again!

*a serious piece of work... If you like a good argument or
pondering on what is real then you ll find plenty to get
your teeth into here.*

- *What s Brewing*, newspaper of the Campaign For Real Ale

•past tense•